# SOVEREIGNTY IN EDUCATION

## CREATING CULTURALLY-BASED CHARTER SCHOOLS IN NATIVE COMMUNITIES

# SPECIAL THANKS

WALTON FAMILY FOUNDATION

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NIEA is grateful for the support of Dr. Kahumoku who authored this publication and lent his expertise to NIEA's efforts to support Native education.

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# IN APPRECIATION

**NIEA's Native Charter School Advisory Group**

The National Indian Education Association is honored to have an illustrious group of educators assist with the development and detailed review of this handbook. NIEA is truly grateful to these educators for their dedication to advancing the well-being of Native students across the United States.

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Under Brian's leadership as Principal/CEO, Pemayetv Emahakv (Pema-yetta Emma-ha-ga) Charter School has been recognized by the State of Florida as one of its highest performing and most innovative charter schools. Located on the Brighton Seminole Indian Reservation in Okeechobee, Florida, the school's Muscogee Creek Immersion Program is a promising model for language preservation throughout the nation, earning the Little Red Schoolhouse Award. Pemayetv Emahakv's students fulfill Florida college credit requirements while preparing for success in the classroom and beyond.

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Phil is the founder of the Sovereign Schools Project at Tribal Education Department National Assembly (TEDNA). The project seeks to create and support a pipeline of Native community-centered charter schools in Oklahoma. Phil is also the Board Chair and the lead applicant of a proposal to create a Sovereign Community School in Oklahoma City.


## Leslie Harper *Ojibwe*

Leslie is a Policy Expert for the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and serves as the current President of the National Coalition for Native American Language Schools and Programs. As a Native American educator, Leslie is also the former Director of a language immersion program for Ojibwe children. She grew up wanting to understand the elders of her tribe who spoke their native language, and she ultimately studied the language as an adult. However, she soon realized that she had very few people to talk to—there are perhaps 100 people in Minnesota today who speak Ojibwe as a first language, and most of them are elders. Leslie has since worked to increase fluency in Ojibwe, believing that knowing it helps give children a stronger sense of their own identity. In the Niigaane program, which she founded, all classes are taught in Ojibwe from kindergarten through sixth grade. The program pairs teachers, who learned Ojibwe as a second language, with elders who speak it as a native tongue. The program had some early challenges. For example, many of the elders hadn't spoken Ojibwe in years and had no words to express modern concepts. Despite these challenges, the program is a success, drawing students from all over northern Minnesota.

## Kevin Shendo *Jemez Pueblo*

Kevin has served as the Education Director for Jemez since 2001; in his responsibilities he oversees the Early Childhood Program, Jemez Community Library, Education Services Center, and School Operations. Kevin was instrumental in the establishment and creation of Walatowa High Charter School, which opened its doors in the fall of 2003. He continues working with the Native American Youth Empowerment (NAYE) organization, which he co- founded in 1993 and where he serves as a program coordinator. NAYE has twice been recognized by the Kellogg Foundation for its innovative work with Native youth. Kevin has served two annual appointments in tribal leadership, as First Lieutenant Governor (2014) and Second Lieutenant Governor (2005) for the Pueblo of Jemez. Kevin served as Chair of the New Mexico Indian Education Advisory Council from 2009–2012 and as one of two Southern Pueblo representatives on the 16-member council from 2007–2012. He was nominated by the Southern Pueblos Governors Council and appointed by the New Mexico Secretary of Education. Kevin graduated with a bachelor's degree in Political Science, with an emphasis in International Affairs, from the University of Colorado at Boulder.

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Kameha'ililani Waiau is a mo'opuna kuakahi of John, Pearl, Manuel and Nellie, mo'opuna of Samuel and Phyllis, and daughter of Al and Aileen of Papakōlea, O'ahu. A seasoned practitioner of culture-based education and an advocate for aloha, she is honored to serve as the Hope Kahu/Principal of Ke Kula o Samuel M Kamakau, LPCS, a Pre-K-12 mauli ola/Hawaiian life force/charter school in Ha'iku, O'ahu-a-Lua. Also an activist-actor and founding member of Ka Halau Hanakeaka, she is recognized by keiki as "Anake" on Aina Oiwi TV. Reflecting on her experiences in the system and the non-traditional sports teams/halau communities that shape her as a contemporary kanaka, Kameha'ililani uses life lessons and anecdotal mo'olelo to nurture her students. #eolakaolelohawaii #kumumauliola #kakookaiapuni #charterschoolsrock #moopunaikealo

# NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOLS
## SUPPORTING NATIVE EDUCATION

The National Indian Education Association (NIEA), through the generous support of the Walton Foundation, has produced this handbook to promote the growth and expansion of Native charter schools throughout the United States. Charter schools offer a creative and innovative space for educators to increase educational opportunities in their communities and allow tribes and other Native communities across the country to offer new pathways to advance Native identity through teaching and learning. Fundamentally, charters that are grounded in Native ways of knowing, believing, and operating, provide an educational avenue that many Native peoples have sought for decades.

Users of this publication will find this text to be descriptive, informative, and full of resources on Native education and Native charter schools. Within these pages are valuable thoughts from some of the most dedicated Native educators and advocates of the Native charter school movement. In addition, this handbook offers a framework for educational success as well as a number of resources to help communities start and then strengthen their own charter schools. Not meant to be comprehensive, this handbook can be considered a starter kit for those interested in Native charter school education.

Native refers to people who are descendants of the original inhabitants of a region or place. NIEA represents American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiians—the native peoples who inhabited areas of this country before the first European settlers arrived.

Native education refers to a form of schooling that blends Native beliefs, understandings, language, and practices with other ways of being and knowing to empower students to become successful, contributing adults.

A Native charter school is a publically funded independent school established by a tribe or Native organization under the terms of a charter with a local or national authority for the purpose of expanding culture- and language-based educational opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. Such schools provide an educational environment that values and integrates Native ways of being and knowing—language, values, practices, knowledge, and belief systems—with contemporary curricular content and approaches to improve the well-being of students.

Although language immersion and other culturally relevant educational approaches have been around for decades, this form of schooling offers communities an avenue to innovatively, uniquely, and successfully blend the very best of indigneous knowledge and know-how with contemporary educational content and practices due to the “deregulated” nature of charter education. Native charter schools offer students meaningful, strengths-based teaching and learning in an environment where Native students are inspired, engaged, and thrive.

NIEA provides this Native Charter School Handbook to its membership as part of an ongoing commitment to improving education opportunities for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. NIEA expects that you will find the following pages an important resource for creating and sustaining powerful learning environments for your Native students.



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# 01

# INTRODUCTION

Since the pasage of Minnesota's charter school law in 1991, charter schools and networks have spread rapidly accross the country. By the 2002-2003 school year, 39 states and the District of Columbia had passed similar legislation and more than 2,700 charter schools were in operation. At last count, nearly three (3) million of America's school-age children were attending charter schools (National Alliance of Charter Schools, 2017). The National Center for Educational Statistics reported in 2016:

> *"Between school years 2003–04 and 2013–14, the percentage of public charter schools increased from 3.1% to 6.6% with the total number increasing from 3,000 to 6,500."*

Two important questions to think about while reading this publication: Why the phenomenal growth? How will this movement support the education of Native children throughout the United States?

## PHENOMENAL GROWTH OF CHARTER SCHOOLS

In an era of high-stakes accountability, state Departments of Education, education funders, and the federal government continually ask how to expand quality education to all of America's children. The Center for Educational Reform in 2015 suggested that one of the answers is charter education.

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2017) defines charter education as:

> *"public schools that operate independently through a contract (or charter) developed between state education officials and community or school leaders. The charter sets goals and metrics for which the school will be held accountable. In exchange for this additional accountability, teachers and school leaders are given the freedom to innovate and make decisions based on evidence of what's working—and what's not—to raise the bar for what is possible in public education."*

Funded by a mix of local, state, and federal tax dollars based on student enrollment ratios, charter schools generally do not charge tuition, are not religious, do not have special entrance requirements, are required to meet state and federal standards, and are judged on how well they meet student achievement targets established through their charter.

## BENEFITS OF CHARTER EDUCATION

There are significant differences between charter education and its mainstream counterparts (Huffington Post, 2012).

- Increased autonomy from school district policies and regulations. This freedom provides opportunities for charter schools to choose a specific niche or focus for

## INSPIRED THOUGHT

**"CHARTER SCHOOLS ALSO ALLOW NATIVE PEOPLE THE FREEDOM TO TAILOR EDUCATION AS THEY SEE FIT, INCLUDING INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE INTO EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES, AND REFOCUSING ON SPECIFIC LEARNING NEEDS OF NATIVE STUDENTS."**

**ANNA NICOTERA**

the type of education offered to parents and their children (Janson and Gronberg, 2017). Some provide teaching and learning through language immersion while others offer course work through STEM education (O'Brian and Dervarics, 2010).

- Fewer regulatory barriers that often bind general public education. This means contracted work hours for faculty, system-wide initiatives, and mandated school board policies can be adjusted, waived, or entirely negated.

- School environments that offer more opportunities for innovation and efficiency. Partnerships with local and even national organizations have led to creative teaching and learning approaches that prepare students for work and career. Reductions in operating budgets force charters to seek alternate funding streams while decreasing wasteful spending.

Charters offer parents choices in an era when non-core subjects—Music, Visual Arts, Languages, and others—are being eliminated in favor of English, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Charters with specialized foci have blossomed in communities where parents desire more holistic approaches to education. Proponents claim that charter education successfully balances non-cognitive and cognitive development, especially for minority and impoverished youth.

### CHALLENGES TO CHARTER EDUCATION

Critics contend that charters underserve students with disabilities. A U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that while 11% of students in public schools during the 2009-2010 school year have disabilities, those students represent only 8% of those enrolled in charters (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). In addition, some charter schools are managed by non-profit boards that receive little oversight and accountability, due to regulatory flexibility and public funding (Fensterwald, 2016). For example, public schools in California must comply with a federal requirement to provide healthy school lunches, while charters are exempt from that requirement, and some do not even serve lunch. In addition, charters in some states are not required to present annual fiscal reports, which has resulted in mismanaged and/or wasteful spending, unpaid teachers, misuse of operating funds, and missing payments for leased school sites (HNNews, 2015).

Some argue that there are questions about the academic growth of charter school students. Although charter schools in Boston and New York have posted impressive gains in student achievement on state tests, some charters "teach to the test" and focus on students who possess the abilities to make the highest gains, as shown by a 2013 report by The Boston Foundation and New Schools Ventures (O'Brian and Dervarics, 2010). Large-scale academic gains in a particular charter school are not generalizable to all charters and represent comparable variances found among mainstream public schools.

The entry of large-scale educational management organizations, or EMOs, in recent decades adds to the already complex, diverse landscape of the charter school world. Generated out of a need to turn around failing public schools in the 1990s, for-profit EMOs managed 13% of charter schools and not-for-profit EMOs managed 16% by 2010 (O'Brian and Dervarics, 2010). In addition to EMOs, charter management organizations (CMOs), educational service providers (ESPs) and charter school networks (CSNs) also appeared on the charter school landscape. Such entities seek to increase uniformity and accountability in charter school education while reducing wasteful spending and mismanagement. These types of structural solutions offer communities less risk when establishing charter schools. Because local

## CRITICAL FACT

**IN 2005 AND 2010, THE NUMBER OF NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOLS HAS GROWN FROM 15 TO 31, REPRESENTING A 15% INCREASE.**

**NATIONAL ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS**

school-community boards normally do not possess the expertise for running a school, many communities turn to CMOs and EMOs to support the start-up and first couple of years of operation.

However, for-profit EMOs and ESPs have come under fire. People question the ethics of private, for-profit companies taking tax revenue from public schools. In fact, the legality of all charters being exclusively public entities is not so clear (Strauss, 2015). The private characterization of many charters gives rise to questions about the co-mingling of local, state, and/or federal funding with private sector funding to operate them.

Charter corporatization has grown so rapidly that more than half of all charter school students in 2017 will be enrolled in schools owned and operated by private EMOs (Stitzlen, 2013). For-profit, corporate models emphasize higher educational standards and more stringent student discipline policies coupled with standardization of teaching and fiscal practices, limited innovation, reduced community involvement, and reduced retention of costly students whose academic success poses less risk or is perceived to be less time-intensive. As a result, these for-profit institutions enroll fewer low-income, disabled, or minority students than their mission-driven, not-for-profit counterparts.

## CHARTER SCHOOLS FOR NATIVE STUDENTS

Just as the charter movement entered the education landscape in urban centers, it has created opportunities for Native communities to form their own education systems. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2013) notes that between 2005 and 2010, the number of Native charter schools grew from 15 to 31, representing a 15% increase. This growth is attributed in part to the 1996 Congressional moratorium that prohibits the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) from building new schools. Anna Nicotera, Senior Director of Research and Evaluation at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, said: “Charter schools also allow Native people the freedom to tailor education as they see fit, including integrating language and culture into educational experiences, and refocusing on specific learning needs of Native students.”

In a report on the impact of charter school education in Indian country, Brian Bielenberg notes that charters allow American Indians to expand their sovereignty by controlling the type of education their children receive (Bielenberg, 2000). Critical aspects of a person’s identity—values, traditional practices, knowledge, and language—can now be integrated into the curriculum offered by charter schools. Unlike BIE schools that are restricted by policy and mandates, Native charter schools with culture- and language-based education have seen significant student gains in self-esteem, attendance, and math and reading comprehension scores, as well as lower dropout rates. Bielenberg also notes charters can promote both socio-emotional and intellectual growth of Native youth.

In a Harvard University review of best practices, Eve Ewing and Meaghan Ferrick recommend that culturally grounded content and instruction be integrated with Western content and standards to help Native students see relevance and value in what they are learning (Ewing and Ferrick, 2012). To fully integrate Native education practices, Bielenberg suggests that pre-service programs and credentialing organizations must train and enable teachers “to recognize, teach, and respect different ways of knowing and learning” (p. 150). Ewing and Ferrick argue that additional research and legislation to strengthen school governance practices and advance Native language, knowledge, and education will improve not only the education of Native students but promote the revitalization of Native languages and cultural practices for generations to come.

In a review of charter schools that serve Native students, Kerry Venegas’ summation of eight dissertations on Native charter schools provides some key insights (Venegas, 2007). Several studies suggest teaching strategies and curricular approaches that integrate Native language, knowledge, and ways of being with Western context and content to better support learning. Others propose public policy changes to improve accountability and expansion of Native charter education. One recommends that charters work in their Native communities to address serious social challenges. All agree that charter schools can become learning environments that balance Native identity—intellect, spirit, knowledge, culture, language, and more—with Western academics.

For Native communities facing the extinction of their language—one of the key components of identity—charter education offers opportunities to repair, revitalize, and renormalize the native tongue (Maxwell, 2014). Language-immersion schools like Ke Kula 'O Nāwahīokalani'ōpu'u Iki Lab Public Charter School and Ke Kula 'O Samuel M. Kamakau (Native Hawaiian) in Hawai'i, Tséhootsooí Diné Bi’ólta’ (Navajo Immersion School) in Arizona, tsalagi tsunadeloquasdi (Cherokee Immersion Charter School) in Oklahoma, Chief Tahgee Elementary Academy (Shoshone) in Idaho, Waadookodading (Ojibwe) Language Immersion School in Wisconsin, Akwesasne Freedom School (Mohawk) in New York, and Ayaprun Elitnaurvik (Yup’ik) in Alaska provide students with an education through their linguistic heritage (McCarty, 2014).

Though immersion education continues to flourish, state regulations require Native students to complete state tests in English rather than their Native languages. Christopher Yim, a former Hawaiian language immersion teacher, testified before state legislators: “One of the biggest challenges facing Ka Papahana Kaiapuni [Hawaiian Language Immersion Program] is that the assessments do not match the language of instruction” (Yim, n.d.). Advocates also argue that it is not enough to simply translate assessments that are written in English because so much is lost in translation. To address assessment issues, Hawaiian language experts applied for and received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to create parallel tests that are linguistically and culturally grounded. Ronn Nozoe notes that in Hawai’i, “We’ve had our struggles about trying to do the right thing...[by] assessing students in their native language...we can have differences, but at the end of the day, we’re going to make it right” (Nozoe, n.d.).

## SUMMARY

As renowned researcher David Adams (1996) noted: teaching Native children requires removal of the historic waves of education meant to wash the Native out. Both advocates and critics of charter education present critical questions that, if addressed, can improve charter school education for students, families, and communities. NIEA supports Native charter schools as they seek to integrate Native knowledge, culture, language, and other aspects of identity into the classroom. NIEA advocates for Native charter education that advances the sovereignty of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians through educational sovereignty. Native charter education is a strong pathway to improving the well-being of Native communities.

# 02

# NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL FRAMEWORK


## DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL FRAMEWORK

NIEA, in conjunction with its National Native Charter School (NCS) Advisory Group, has created a framework to support the development and enhancement of charter schools for Native students. Through this framework, we provide a graphic overview of how Native communities can build, manage, and expand charter schools that effectively serve their students. This framework is split into three fundamental sections: Starting a Native Charter School; Operating a Native Charter School; and Sustaining a Native Charter School.

## FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

NIEA's Native Charter School Framework provides handbook users a quick look at relevant topics within each section. As shown in the Native Charter School Operations framework, it is critical for administrators to determine the school's philosophy, educational program, and governance structure when submitting a proposal to establish a charter school (normally required by a state agency). Going through a process of determination ensures communities or organizations funding the planning process that these foundational components are well in place prior to a school opening its doors.

As noted earlier, this handbook is meant to be a starter kit rather than a comprehensive compilation of everything one needs to establish and sustain a Native charter school. Due to variations in state law and the rapid pace of charter school legislation, the details of establishing a charter school vary from community to community. This handbook framework provides key elements of effective processes to establish, operate, and sustain a Native charter school in your community.



**"THIS HANDBOOK IS MEANT TO BE A STARTER KIT RATHER THAN A COMPREHENSIVE COMPILATION OF EVERYTHING ONE NEEDS TO ESTABLISH AND SUSTAIN A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL."**

# 03

# STARTING A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

As presented in the opening of this handbook, the growing movement around Native education in the United States over the last several decades is part of a push against a history of boarding schools, suppression of Native languages and ways of life, and other injustices against Native communities. In 2007, the United Nations (U.N.) passed the Declaration of Indigenous Rights, a hallmark recognition of the historic trauma faced by Native peoples across the world — the discrimination and oppression endured through colonialization, the dispossession of their lands and terrioritories, and the prevention of the freedom to develop in ways that support their own ways of being and living. This declaration, with widespread international backing, supports the inherent right of Native peoples to political, social, economic, spiritual, and other structures that enable them to exist in ways appropriate to their traditions, philosophies, and belief systems. It also highlights the need to return to them their traditional lands and territories as well as the rights delineated in treaties and agreements. The U.N. called for an end to all forms of discrimination and oppression, wherever they might occur, in an effort to empower Native peoples to organize themselves to promote sovereignty through whatever forms available—government, economic systems, traditional, cultural and/or spiritual formations. Although such a powerful statement exists, American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian communities continue to struggle to support the education of their young through Native ways.




## CHAPTER 3A:
## CREATING A NATIVE PHILOSOPHIC FOUNDATION

One of the most critical questions to ask before beginning down the pathway toward building a charter school is: Why start one?

Members of the Berkeley Parents Network report that they were able to persevere through the many obstacles to create the Yu Ming Charter School for Mandarin language immersion in Oakland, California (Jones, 2014). Wynee Sade, a parent at Yu Ming said, “We were looking at local public and private schools here in Oakland, which are terrific, but no language [was offered] until much later on and no Chinese even at that later stage....It just wasn’t an option.”

Sade and eight other parents who experienced similar difficulties, joined together to petition for a charter school that would provide education through Mandarin language and Chinese culture. Parents started by creating a vision and mission to govern every aspect of the school, from general policies and procedures to the types of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and classroom environments taught by teachers and experienced by the school’s students. Over six months, parents crafted this document through careful collaboration with administrators, teachers, and principals.

**To establish a philosophic base, essential questions to consider are:**

- Why start this charter school?
- What will be its defining features?
- What makes this school uniquely Native?

According to a study conducted by Vanderbilt’s Peabody College, the answers to these questions ranked at the top of the advice list for 110 charter school founders (Cannata, Thomas, and Thombre, 2013). The study concluded that a charter school’s mission establishes its defining features and is the foundational determinant to what will be taught and how the school operates.

One of the study participants advised: “I think the most important thing is the mission, the

vision that the founders have. You don't make a vision a reality on the opening day of school, but the commitment to making that a reality has got to be there for everybody, not just for the founders, but for the staff, the families and the kids."

### A PHILOSOPHIC CHOICE: STRENGTHENING NATIVE WELL-BEING

The World Indigenous Nation's Higher Education Consortia (WINHEC) offers the following set of guiding principles for Native educational programs that seek a culturally grounded accreditation, with certification rooted in a Native community's framing of well-being (World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortia, 2007). WINHEC posits that Native peoples have already determined what constitutes well-being and one of the responsibilities of schools is to promote such a philosophy in the education of Native students. In WINHEC's model, five key components—economic vibrancy, health potency, ways of being, excellence, and cultural and linguistic revitalization and/or normalcy—should be identified by the school or institution before it seeks accreditation. Through these five lenses, Native charter schools create a unique system of education dedicated to improving the well-being of Native communities.

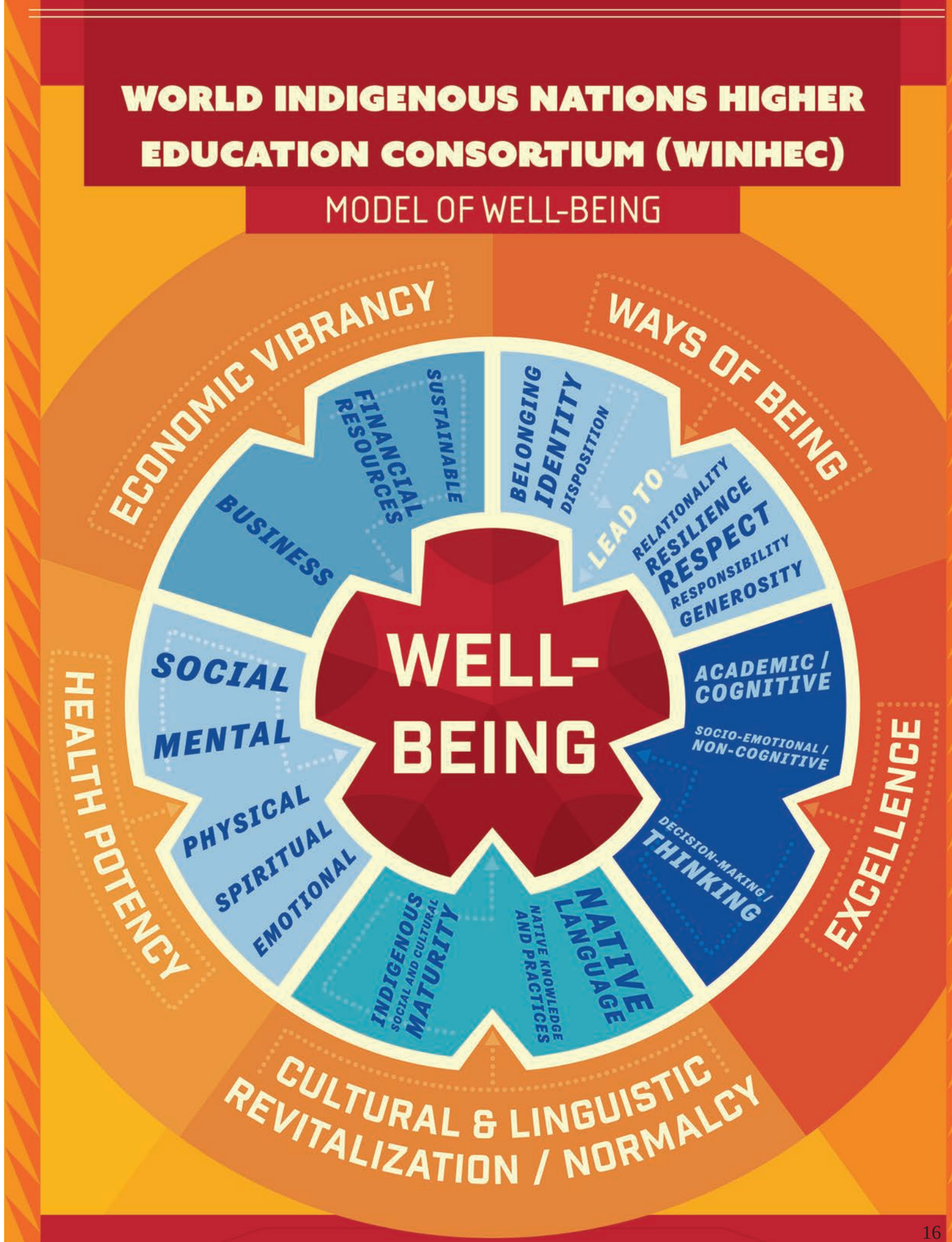
Native charters must create unique forms of education that integrate Native languages and cultures with mainstream education practices, as well as address trauma stemming from historic injustices against the Native peoples they serve. Native educational organizations should then not only embrace and incorporate the belief systems of the Native community(ies) they serve but also articulate a philosophy that promotes the overall well-being of the students, their families, and the wider community. These are then embedded in the school's mission and vision.

As Native communities determine how to start up a Native charter school, every decision administrators make should be based on how that choice fulfills the mission and vision of the institution (Cannata, Thomas, and Thombre, 2013). Through their employment processes, curriculum, and pedagogy Native charter schools implement the mission and vision of the community. Such methods are familiar to private and independent schools that utilize their philosophies to attract new students and their families.

When a school's philosophic platform is grounded in the belief systems of the community it serves, education becomes a vehicle to create positive learning environments where Native students can be inspired, be engaged, and thrive. Thus, philosophy is essential to the future of a Native charter school.

# CHAPTER 3B:
## WHY IS PUBLIC POLICY IMPORTANT TO NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOLS

Although the U.N. has advocated for the rights of Native peoples for more than a decade, Native communities in the United States continue to face significant challenges to the ways in which their young are educated. Many tribes and Native communities are experiencing the loss of their languages and look to education as one of the most critical avenues to revitalizing language and the cultural practices, knowledge, and expertise embedded within. "When a language dies, a culture and a form of understanding of the world dies together with it," said Javier Lopez Sanchez, Director General of the National Institute for Indigenous Languages (U.N. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, 2011). "Language is culture. It's a fundamental tool to understand the world and how social organizations work at all levels. Through language and culture human beings are able to interact."



FEATURED CHARTER SCHOOL

# KANU O KA ʻAINA NEW CENTURY CHARTER SCHOOL, K-12 WAIMEA, HAWAIʻI

**Mission/Vision Statement:**

KANU's mission is Kūlia i ka nuʻu, or strive for the highest. A philosophy of excellence guides KANU as we collectively design, implement, and continuously evaluate a quality, culturally-driven, intergenerational Hawaiian model of education with Aloha.

Our name, kanu o ka ʻāina, literally means "plants of the land" and figuratively refers to "natives of the land from generations back." This name reflects the commitment of our school, our staff , our students, and their families to perpetuate Hawaiʻi's native language, culture, and traditions, as mandated by Article X of Hawaiʻi's state constitution. It also demonstrates our efforts to assure that future generations of Waimea residents have the choice to remain natives of this land.



The impact of assimilation policies against Native peoples is evident. Many have lost their original homelands, languages, and ways of being and knowing. For many Native communities in the United States, assimilation policies at residential boarding schools sought to erase American Indian and Alaska Native languages and culture.

> *In these institutions, children were severely punished, both physically and psychologically, for using their own languages instead of English. These experiences convinced entire generations of Native people that their children would be better off learning to speak only English. Hoping to spare their children the pain they once went through, parents stopped passing their languages on to their children, and thereby stopped creating fluent speakers of those languages. As a result, numerous languages indigenous to America are now severely in danger of losing their last native speakers (Klug, 2012).*

Scott Russell, Secretary of the Crow Tribe (Apsáalooke Nation), said: "We're educating all our students to be non-Native right now" (Klug, 2012). Former President Barack Obama acknowledged that there is a crisis in Native American education that can be resolved only by returning control of Native education to tribes and Native communities (Huffington Post, 2014).

## NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS AND APPLICATION PROCESS

While there are a few states that do not permit charter schools, most have created laws and charter school authorizer procedures to support tribes and Native communities throughout the application process. According to the National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC), the 42 states that have authorized the operation

## INSPIRED THOUGHT

**"WHEN A LANGUAGE DIES A CULTURE AND A FORM OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD DIES TOGETHER WITH IT."**

**JAVIER LOPEZ SANCHEZ**

# CRITICAL FACT:

## 42 STATES AUTHORIZED CHARTER SCHOOLS THAT SERVE 7% OF SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

**NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL RESOURCE CENTER**

of charter schools serve approximately 7% of school-age children across the country (National Charter School Resource Center, n.d.).

# CHAPTER 3C:
## DESIGNING A NATIVE-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

### NATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Native parents and guardians want the best education possible for their students. As the National Congress of American Indians argues, "Education prepares Native children not only for active and equal participation in the global market, but also to be positive, involved members of their communities" (National Congress of American Indians, n.d.). However, public schools equipped to provide such an education in Native communities remain few and far between. Thus, tribes and Native leaders across the country are turning to charter schools to implement educational sovereignty.

### NATIVE PHILOSOPHY IN A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL EDUCATION PROGRAM

If a Native charter school represents the hopes and dreams for improving the type of schooling Native students receive, then its philosophic foundations—found in its mission and vision—are vital to developing an educational program that will counter the effects of intergenerational trauma inflicted on Native peoples. Moreover, a school's vision becomes the foundation upon which individual educators can actualize meaningful teaching and learning for Native students. Within this type of classroom, the design of curriculum and the implementation of pedagogy reflect such a philosophic base. According to Native Hawaiian educator Ka'imipono Ka'iwi, educators can "begin a home and then move outward; work from the familiar to the unfamiliar" (Ka'iwi and Kahumoku, 2006.). Curriculum should start with the strengths and values in the child's home community and then flow between the known and the unknown. In this way, students find affirmation in Native ways of knowing and believing as they explore new knowledge. There is then an equal footing between Native and Western ways.

### DESIGNING NATIVE-BASED CURRICULUM

Education in America traditionally silos the "core" disciplines—English/ELA, Social Studies, Math, and Science—which linearize, dissect, and separate each as independent, discrete pieces of information that students must memorize and recite on a test. Meanwhile, Native educators find themselves creating fluid, interconnected systems of understanding between these core subject areas and Native knowledge. Native people, according to Ka'iwi, have always been "readers." Native peoples were literate in charting changes in the winds and rains, streams and ocean currents, landscapes, and insect and animal migrations—all of which occurred in the world around them. They were and continue to be skilled at reading the stars and seas, seeing the universe's maps to sail thousands of miles of open ocean far before European and American explorers began venturing beyond their shores.

Literacy and English-Language Arts now take the form of stories—oral and written—that are passed down through the generations. Tongan storyteller, Emil Wolfgramm, shares that "our [N]ative culture is contained in our language and our stories" (Ka'iwi and Kahumoku, 2006). These literary gems speak of important events, long-established protocol systems and our heroes—past and present—that rival today's best History and Social Studies curricula. Likewise, Native peoples continue scientific processes that promote sustainability and environmental management. Biology, Earth Science, Physics, and Chemistry integrated with Native traditional knowledge and expertise now help our youth

# INSPIRED THOUGHT

## "BEGIN AT HOME AND THEN MOVE OUTWARD; WORK FROM THE FAMILIAR TO THE UNFAMILIAR."

**KA'IMIPONO KA'IWI**

# INSPIRED THOUGHT

**"OUR NATIVE CULTURE IS CONTAINED IN OUR LANGUAGE AND OUR STORIES."**

**EMIL WOLFGRAMM**

not only understand how to apply what they are learning to their environment but also to be proud of who they are and where they are heading as Natives living in today's complex world.

To create a Native-based curriculum is to empower Native students to celebrate their heritage as they walk through modern life and pave the way for future generations. Utilizing a Native philosophic foundation, Native charter school educators can challenge mainstream notions of Native cultures by exploring the wonders of Native knowledge and strengthen their students' resilience and persistence by imploring them to match in magnitude and magnificance the works of their ancestors. Today's Native educational programs build upon ancestral knowledge and encompass modern curricular content to empower bold intellectuals and leaders, lawyers and doctors, farmers and carpenters.

## ACCESSING NATIVE-BASED PEDAGOGY

Dr. Aluli Meyer in her work "Culture Restores Culture" found that education through culture strengthens identity (Meyer, 2004). When cultural practices are utilized as strategies for teaching and learning, the ways of our ancestors are brought to the present and made relevant to the next generation. One such example is with a Hawaiian way of organizing knowledge called makawalu. Makawalu means "eight eyes;" figuratively it refers to the process of examining multiple perspectives, facets, or parts of a whole. When the concept of makawalu is applied as a pedagogy—a way to instruct—Native Hawaiian youth become keenly aware that there are multiple right answers and ways of knowing, not a singular answer. Through this instructional strategy, Native Hawaiian students are allowed to present their perspectives on a topic of study without fear of being told that they are wrong or worse, dumb or stupid. Hawaiian educators employing makawalu are now finding that their Native Hawaiian students are more apt to participate and discuss, explore and innovate, look at the world in more meaningful ways. Transforming instruction

FEATURED CHARTER SCHOOL

# WALATOWA HIGH CHARTER SCHOOL, 9-12 JEMEZ PUEBLO, NEW MEXICO

**Mission/Vision Statement:**

Through a community-integrated experiential learning program, Walatowa High Charter School will prepare students to be academically successful, while promoting Cultural awareness, community wellness, Leadership, and College/ Career readiness.

From the outset, WHCS's founders, administrators, faculty and governance council recognized that young people who understand their identity and appreciate their unique heritage are the best-equipped to become effective students and citizens. The principal focus of WHCS's academic program is early college preparation, including dual credit coursework, emphasizing the value of the community's (Jemez Pueblo, Zia Pueblo and Jemez Valley Corridor) culture, and traditions.

Support for WHCS's academic program has been received from New Mexico Public Education Department and NMPED Public Education Commission, and the Pueblos of Jemez and Zia Administrations.

FEATURED CHARTER SCHOOL

# SAN DIEGO RIVERSIDE CHARTER SCHOOL, K-8 JEMEZ PUEBLO, NEW MEXICO

**Mission/Vision Statement:**

SDRCS is committed to strengthening and sustaining pride in the unique cultural identity of our students. As a community-based charter school, we encourage involvement of the entire community in developing a quality education for our students by connecting learning with community values and traditions. Through this commitment our students will be academically and socially prepared for high school.

Serving the Jemez community since 1906, first as a mission school, then as a tribal school, SDRCS is now based on the desire to develop innovative educational opportunities and services that meet the needs of Jemez Pueblo families and children and to promote high academic achievement for all students. Curriculum is designed to promote the Jemez language through immersion/multidisciplinary approaches to education.



through a Native pedagogy reaffirms to Native students that they are important and profoundly brilliant, can be proud of who they are and where they come from, and see the connection between home (ways of knowing, knowledge, teaching) and school.

## THE POWER OF NATIVE LANGUAGE

In a 2016 Papakū Makawalu workshop, Dr. Pualani Kanaka'ole Kanahele shared that our ʻ ōlelo Hawaiʻi (Hawaiian language) contains our epistemology—our worldview—the "how" of interacting with our environment (Kanaka'ole, 2016). When we deconstruct our Native vernacular and "how" our ancestors constructed language, we better understand their perspectives about life and the world around them. For example, the Hawaiian word for intelligence is naʻauao—literally meaning an enlightened gut. Ignorance is called naʻaupō—a darkened gut. Both words refer to a way of being—one should seek knowledge and behave in ways that would enlighten not only the individual, but be for the collective goodness of all. Through a Native lens, critical thinking asks Native Hawaiian students to trust their na'au by paying heed to feelings and intuition, or what Rubellite Kawena Johnson described as the "sixth sense: awareness" (Meyer, 2004).

Ka'iwi uses this approach when teaching students how to approach writing, especially "timed writing," to prepare for the Advanced Placement English exams. She employs this makawalu process of deconstruction to help her students explore and formulate perspectives on texts written in Hawaiian as well as those written in English. More importantly, she has refined her ability to teach literary analysis—the non-Native practice of deconstructing the meaning of a text—through makawalu and ʻōlelo Hawai'i. Over the last six years, her students have consistently scored higher than their Hawaiian counterparts in public and most independent schools on the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition exam (Kahumoku, In Press).

## CRITICAL FACT

**"THERE IS A CRITICAL NEED TO ALIGN TESTS AND OTHER ASSESSMENTS WITH NATIVE CULTURE AND LANGUAGE...."**

**2014 NATIVE YOUTH REPORT**

## ASSESSMENT: CHRONICLING ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH NATIVE AND MODERN PRACTICE

When creating state testing and examining processes during the development of a Native charter school, it is evident that current teaching practices—curriculum, instruction, assessment, and classroom environment—have not served Native students well. According to the 2014 Native Youth Report, there is a critical need to align tests and other assessments with Native culture and language so that many more Native students can be recognized for their strengths (Executive Office of the President, 2014).

Most standardized, summative tests were created to test white middle class values, knowledge, experiences, and beliefs. Then they are boxed and packaged to test Native children against middle-class white America, so that when a child from the Havasupai community near the Grand Canyon in Arizona sees a question about sailing or snowfall, she or he stumbles because the content is unfamiliar. Moreover, many tests do not ask children to apply what they have learned to real life; rather, most will assess for content memory, functional operations, and/or technical, not-real-life understandings. Meyer argues, "The belief that meaning was tied to learning was not something hidden or subtle... It is the core of why we do things—it must have a function for information to become knowledge and knowledge to become understanding" (Aluli Meyer, 1998).

For the Native charter school, assessments should showcase knowledge beyond traditional academics and intellectual growth. They should also be aligned with cultural and linguistic practices and ways of being and knowing, and include more holistic measures that allow educators to gauge the growth of the whole rather than simply what is cognitively occurring in children. Learning then reflects purposes and meanings within the classroom as well as in the world outside of school.

Project and performance-based assessments can be used to support Native education systems. Instead of testing for an accumulation of content knowledge, students are assessed through a performance of a real-life task to demonstrate the various standards, content, understandings, and ways of being required by the teacher. Clear project-based rubrics identify standards, cultural and linguistic knowledge, community-based outcomes, and other expectations. These projects elevate students' comprehension of required knowledge, skills, and dispositions as well as support continued engagement as students solve for critical issues in their community.

When examining the types of assessment to employ in a Native charter school, one may ask:

- Why is the blend of Native and modern skills/content important to know?
- What must Native students know to successfully execute the culminating assessment?
- How will each practice/activity inform or build to the next step in learning for a Native child?
- If applied, how will the skills/content learned strengthen the students' future as Native adults?
- What critical skills, knowledge, and dispositions must a Native student master in order to be a contributing adult in his or her community as well as others?
- Given the local and state laws and requirements, how can Native educators assess their students and collect the data necessary to comply with required student academic performance measures while also ensuring achievement of cultural, linguistic, and other aspects of their Native worldview?

## CREATING A THRIVING, HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Education expert Christy Williams argues that there are five key ways to create a positive learning environment in the classroom (Williams, 2016).

1. Recognize that students should feel like they belong, especially in school. To do this, teachers should create classrooms that are welcoming, engaging, and reflect who students are.
2. Teachers should build and strengthen relationships with each student. Teachers should know each student by name (and pronounce names correctly), interact with students beyond the classroom, and treat students with respect. Studies on the importance of the teacher-student relationship indicate that stronger relationships lead to more student engagement and academic success.
3. Curriculum and instruction must "stay relevant."
4. Teachers must set clear expectations and consistently follow through when those expectations are not met.
5. Educators must be positive. Smile, laugh with, and above all, enjoy being with students.

The Hawai'i Department of Education has adopted six outcomes that are based on Hawaiian values. These six, called Nā Hopena A'o, are now being implemented across the 250+ schools throughout the state and

# INSPIRED THOUGHT

**"TIME AND AGAIN, THERE IS AN IRREFUTABLE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL."**

**CHARTER BOARD PARTNERS**

FEATURED CHARTER SCHOOL

# PEMAYETV EMAHAKV CHARTER SCHOOL, PRE-K-8 OKEECHOBEE, FLORIDA

**Mission/Vision Statement:**

Pemayetv Emahakv (Our Way School) exists to provide parents, students and the community of Brighton with a school that meets high standards of student academic achievement by providing a rigorous student oriented curriculum, infused with the Seminole language and culture, in an environment that is safe, nurturing, conducive to learning and designed to preserve Seminole traditions.

Pemayetv Emahakv is dedicated to providing a safe, nurturing learning environment that fosters academic, social and emotional growth. We believe in incorporating an integrated curriculum, using the team approach to education, and demonstrating the relevance of each subject for our students while insuring the Seminole culture is a part of the daily life of students.

Caring, qualified and dedicated teachers are the hallmark of Pemayetv Emahakv and the result is a focus on individualized attention for our children. We foster self-respect, self-motivation, responsibility and self-esteem. Our goal is to encourage a lifelong love for learning in each child and to preserve the Seminole language and culture.



encourage stakeholders to collectively create a HĀ environment in their school. Such spaces ask school faculty, staff, and leadership to role model for students a strengthened sense of: Belonging, Responsibility, Excellence, Aloha, Total Well-Being, and Hawai'i—the latter of which includes knowledge and skills to speak Hawaiian, talk about the history of the Hawaiian people, and explain the importance of place to all those living in the islands. The hope is that every child—whether Hawaiian or not—will thrive through this vibrant learning environment.

Native charter schools have become empowered spaces of learning. As Native communities start to conceptualize what such schools might look and feel like, these important education-program elements ought to be woven into the application process and eventually into operations.

# CHAPTER 3D: ESTABLISHING A NATIVE-GROUNDED GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY

## WHY ARE GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY NECESSARY?

According to Naomi DeVeaux (2016), public charter school boards are essential contributors when creating a well-run and organized institution (DeVeaux, 2016). These individuals hire the school's leadership, establish its vision and mission, ensure accountability and oversight, authorize expansions and replications, and in some instances, have the power to close the school. A well-functioning school will possess engaged, well-trained, and informed board members. Likewise, a solid board is clearly invested in and partners with the school's leader to ensure its success. And, by law, the "buck stops with the board" (Charter Board Partners, 2014).

According to the Charter Board Partners:

> *"A high performing charter school board focuses on student achievement, acts strategically, recruits an exceptional school leader, raises and uses resources wisely, and fulfills all compliance expectations, but it only manages two things: the school leader, and itself. Charter school boards must manage themselves by investing in proven governance best practices regarding board composition, committee structure, meetings, and dynamics."*

For those interested in establishing a new Native charter school, one of the most difficult questions to address is who should sit on the school board. Given the immense responsibilities of such a board, many are reluctant to sit on a charter school board. When establishing a charter school in a small community where few individuals are willing to become a board member, choosing members becomes difficult and even, at times, impossible. A disorganized board and charter school authorization process will create a confusing situation for all involved.

Often, the following warning signs will become evident when the selection or operations of the board goes awry (Annie E. Casey Foundation, n.d.):

- The founders transfer onto the school's board without understanding the objectivity needed as a member of the board.
- Meddlesome boards become entangled with issues normally entrusted to school leaders and their teachers.
- Founders who sit on the board and are the school's leaders have difficulty differentiating between the roles.

## CRITICAL FACT

**CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE FUNDED AT APPROXIMATELY 64% OF THEIR DISTRICT COUNTERPARTS, AVERAGING $7,131 PER PUPIL AS COMPARED TO AN AVERAGE OF $11,184 FOR THEIR MAINSTREAM COUNTERPARTS**

CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM



- Conflict within the board often increases when the division of roles and duties are not clear.
- Expecting too much from board members increases frustration and exhaustion.
- Lack of professional knowledge and competence in terms of finance, public policy, management, and education leads to poor decision making.
- Working collaboratively to achieve student success becomes an afterthought to other, more personal agendas.
- Failure to have a system in place to rotate board members on and off the board and/or to remove unproductive board members escalates tension and conflict.

Many of these warning signs have unfortunately led to the closure of Native charter schools across the nation. It is imperative that the board maintains:

- A high level of Native moral integrity in all that they do;
- A clear focus on student well-being and achievement;
- Partnerships and funding streams that support the continued growth of the institution;
- An informed, functioning process for making decisions;
- A sense of balance between expectations, professional and personal responsibilities, and the charter school work;
- A level of separation from the running of the school; and
- A strong willingness to work collaboratively to support the school.

There are many publications available to guide start-ups in choosing the right folks for their board (Charter Board Partners, 2014). Included in a number of resources are standards for board work, guides to create effectively functioning boards, descriptions of board life cycles, and more.

### CHOICE OF SCHOOL LEADER

Because of the plethora of publications to assist with recruiting and selecting a school leader for a charter school, the following advice is given for those interested in starting a Native charter school. Though not comprehensive, these suggestions offer start-ups a few ideas about how to begin the process of selecting their school leader.

- Highly competent, strong school leaders increase charter schools' ability to succeed. While a Native leader may be preferred, competence and a willingness to implement and sustain Native forms of education should be a priority.
- Clearly defining roles and responsibilities between the school leader and the board will enable both to effectively govern the school. Both the board and the school leader must understand their roles and responsibilities in order that the school effectively achieves its mission and forward vision.
- Having a succession plan, especially when a founder becomes the first school leader, is vital. Although constantly changing leadership is detrimental to the effective operations of the school, holding steadfast to a succession plan to rotate out both board and school leader is an important means of ensuring continual forward progress.
- Constructing a Native leadership and management model based on the Native charter school's mission and vision—and, in particular—in alignment with the Native values, leadership principles, and ways of leading found in the Native community the school serves is both wise and needed. When congruent, Native charter schools can be governed in ways that uphold Native beliefs and appropriate patterns of behavior, and revitalize overall well-being. When not aligned or incongruent, particularly when influenced by colonized

**"A HIGH PERFORMING CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD FOCUSES ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, ACTS STRATEGICALLY, RECRUITS AN EXCEPTIONAL SCHOOL LEADER, RAISES AND USES RESOURCES WISELY, AND FULFILLS ALL COMPLIANCE EXPECTATIONS…."**

notions of power, authority, and superiority, the school becomes a mechanism for self-aggrandizement and gain. There are many instances of such issues occurring in Native education.

These suggestions are meant to support the functioning of Native charters. However, these aspects must be designed far before the first student enters the door of the school. Planning for the type of governance and authority structure will help to place a Native charter school on the right foundation.

# CHAPTER 3E:
## GENERATING START-UP FUNDING

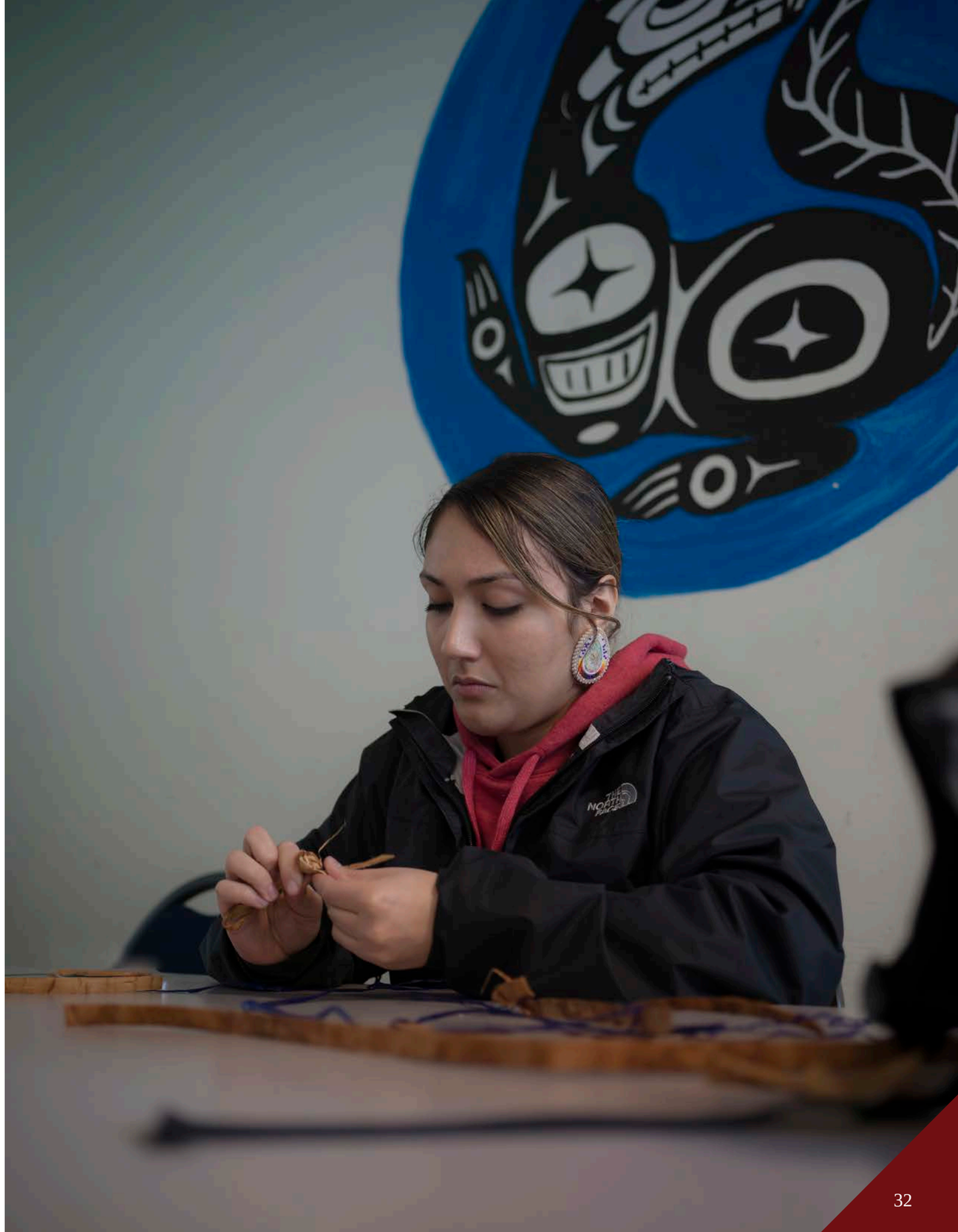
The last section of this chapter articulates some ideas about securing adequate funding to pay for facilities, faculty and staff, leadership, and other aspects of general operations. While there are a mix of available funding sources—district or state funds, grants, tribal or Native community funds, individual philanthropy, and others—many start-ups have not adequately assessed the wide range of available financial resources prior to submission of a charter proposal.

According to the Center for Education Reform, charter schools are funded at approximately 64% of their district counterparts, averaging $7,131 per pupil compared to $11,184 for mainstream, traditional schools (Center for Education Reform, n.d.). The comparison, according to Miron and Urschel (2010), is misleading because the funding formulas within states differ dramatically in amount, sources, and patterns of revenues. Charters in particular receive a good deal of private revenue as well. Without adequate start-up funds, proposals—no matter how well conceived—will not become schools. The trick is finding such funding.

To ensure adequate funding for starting up a Native charter school, one may consider the following set of resources:

- Center for Education Reform:
- Miron, G. and Urschel, J. L. from the Education and the Public Interest Center (2010): Equal or Fair? A Study of Revenues and Expenditures in American Charter Schools.
- Education Commission of the States:
- U.S. Department of Education:

**"PLANNING FOR THE TYPE OF GOVERNANCE AND AUTHORITY STRUCTURE WILL HELP TO PLACE A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL ON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION."**



# 04

# NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS


In this section, Readers will learn four key aspects of establishing and operating a Native charter school. Again, aspects like finances and funding as well as dealing with national, regional, state, and local education agencies that govern charter schools in your area will not be addressed here. The specific regulations, policies, procedures and requirements, and funding streams are particular to your state and local area.

Rather, this chapter covers how and why Native charters should make some critical decisions about their (1) Administration and Personnel, (2) Communications and Advocacy, and (3) Admissions. These three components are among a number of key choices that start-up charters should make before the first student walks into class for the first time. Once the school is in operation, these three decisions should be reviewed and monitored closely to ensure that every student and her or his family are served well.



## CHAPTER 4A: ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL

Typically, the school board selects a school leader—called the principal or head of school—who has the qualifications, disposition, and expertise to start up a Native charter. As was noted in the previous chapter, these qualities will help the school shape its educational and operational approaches to working with stakeholders. While being Native might seem to be a criteria for success, it is more important that the school's first leader have the expertise and disposition to initiate a Native educational program that is grounded in an Native community's beliefs, language, knowledge, values, and ways of being and integrated with modern educational content.

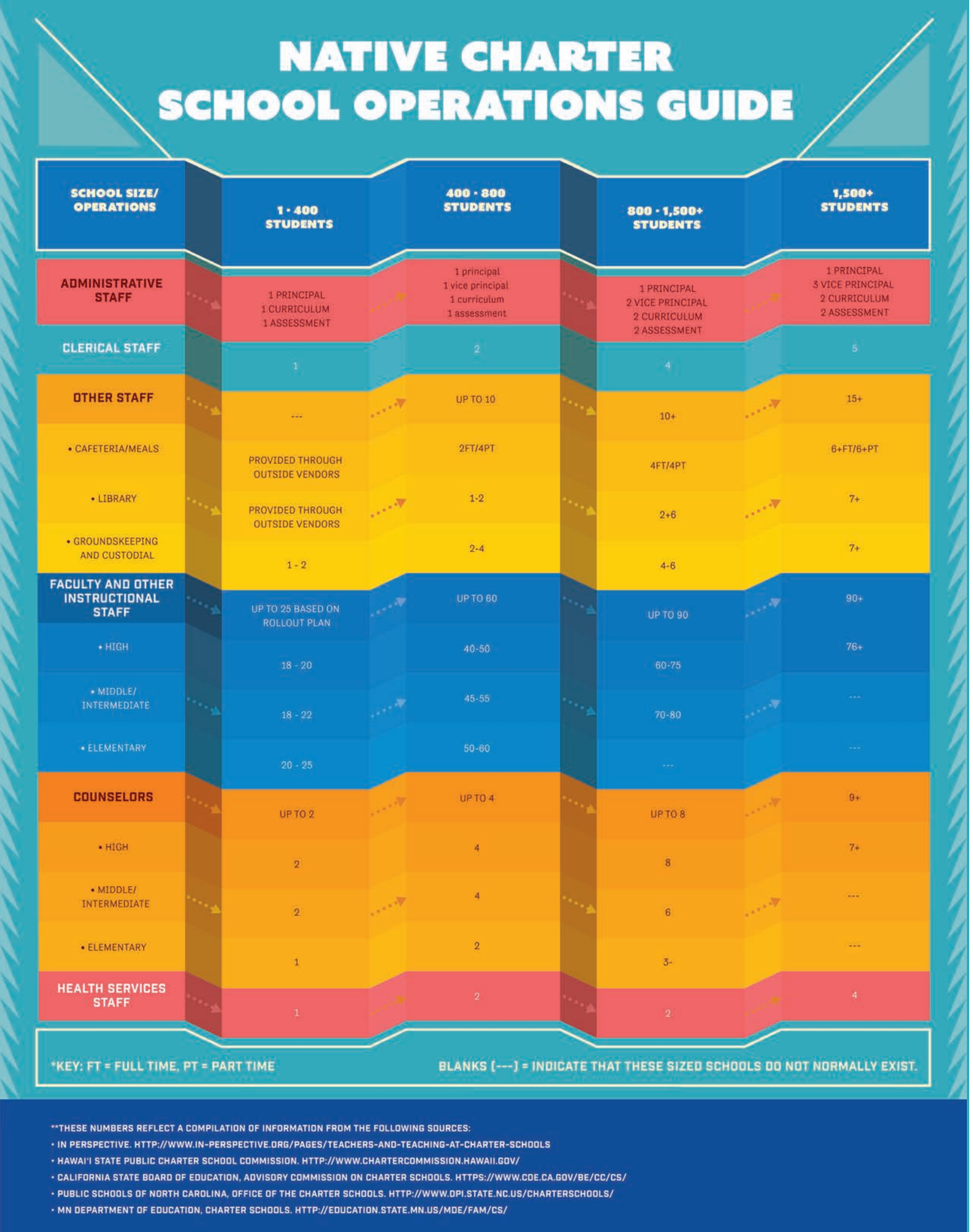
Who this school leader chooses to support him/her—a vice principal, office manager, curriculum and assessment director, others—is also of critical importance given that these individuals will assist teachers and staff to support student growth throughout the school year. Depending on the size of the school when it first opens its doors, the number of administrative staff may initially be small (see the school size chart) and will grow as the school's student body grows. Over time, as funding and student population increase, what may have been a small start-up operation may turn into a large support and administrative staff.

In addition, decisions about when other staff—custodial, library services, cafeteria, and others—should be factored into the overall school staff are normally left to the school's administrative team. However, it is of note that many small start-ups consider these staff non-essential, believing that such work can be executed by classroom teachers—a common mistake. Those wishing to start up a charter school should factor in groundskeepers, custodial staff, and health services staff beyond classroom teachers and school counselors.

According to IN PERSPECTIVE, charter school teachers generally are younger, less educated, less experienced, newer to their schools and the profession of teaching, paid less, more ethnically diverse, and in need of professional development opportunities (IN PERSPECTIVE, n.d.). Since they are new to the profession, many charter educators seek courses on student discipline, classroom management, teaching English-language learners, and learners with disabilities. It isn't until well into their third or fourth year that teachers turn to improving their content knowledge and ability to teach through technology and other innovative practices.

Equally, other staff—librarians, technology experts, and clerical support—tend to mirror their classroom colleagues. Also, if the start-up begins its first year with the basic complement of faculty and office staff, many of these duties are passed to faculty with some capacity for doing the job. IN PERSPECTIVE reported that because of the additional burdens placed on the teaching faculty, teacher turnover can be high, and over the last decade, turnover among charter principals was also higher than at traditional public schools.

In certain circumstances, new charter schools address an interesting set of situations. If faced with union requirements, charters—when appropriate and possible—will negotiate a moratorium on union dues, labor requirements, hiring procedures, and others during the first couple of years (IN PERSPECTIVE, n.d.). Start-ups will also conduct a market analysis on pay to seek ways to comparably pay leadership, faculty, and staff—although in many instances, they will pay slightly less than their mainstream counterparts (Center For Education Reform, n.d.). Moreover, start-ups, due to their small size, will seek to combine grade levels and have mixed-age student groupings, extend classes and/or the school day, and base pay raises on teacher-student performance.




## SUGGESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATION AND PERSONNEL

In the first couple of years of existence, a Native charter may consider:

- How to develop its teaching staff, many of whom will need professional development and time to prepare for their teaching line. Start-ups should invest in hiring their teaching faculty about six months prior to the start of school and provide training and curricular template workshops. Given that there are no culture-based pre-made, purchased resources available, the time commitment to supporting educational staff will be a great investment.

- Identifying ways to incorporate and integrate Native culture, beliefs, language, and others into every aspect of the school—from its classrooms to its playgrounds and cafeteria. In this way, a community's worldview is identified not only in the school's mission and vision but in every other part of the school.

- Personnel and resources to support the opening and maintenance of a Native charter school. Many communities face the challenge of finding well-qualified Native teachers.

- Incorporating the culture and language of different communities at one school site. Some schools find teaching difficult when trying to serve the needs of students from different Native communities. How does a teacher develop curriculum that is relevant to the majority of her/his students?

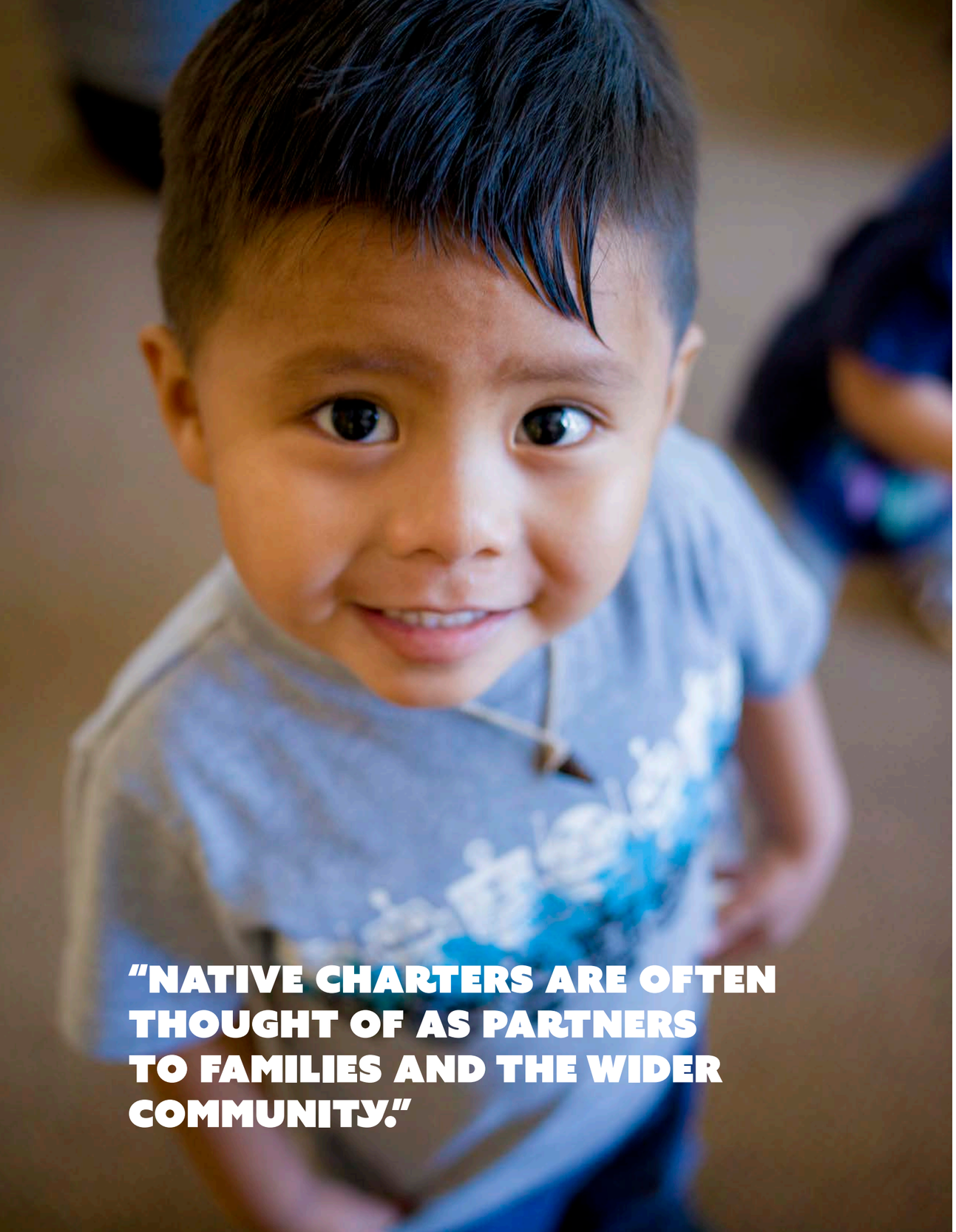
- Understand how to balance the needs of the school with the well-being of its staff and faculty. Often, school founders are willing to give much, if not most, of their lives and well-being to their dream of opening and operating a school. Unfortunately, the staff and faculty become burdened with the weight of doing multiple jobs and wearing multiple hats in pursuit of this dream. A Native charter school, especially in its first couple of years, must care well for its faculty and staff so that these frontline folks can work toward being whole and well, who are able to speak in the language of their students while teaching a content area— especially in English, Math, Science, and Social Studies. Start-ups must consider how to assist teachers who are new to the community to improve their teaching effectiveness.

- Incorporating the culture and language of different communities at one school site. Some schools find teaching difficult when trying to serve the needs of students from different Native communities. How does a teacher develop curriculum that is relevant to the majority of her/his students?

# CHAPTER 4B: ADMISSIONS

Once the mission and vision have been established, the admissions process for accepting students should be aligned with them to fulfill the educational philosophy of the school. As Anna Nicotera, Senior Director of Research and Evaluation at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools states, "Charter schools allow Native people the freedom to tailor education as they see fit, including integrating language and culture into educational experiences, and refocusing on specific learning needs of Native students."

A Native charter school admissions policy should attract and grow students and families who align with the school's foundational philosophy. Native charters, especially in preparing to open their doors, should focus on developing a strong application and admitting process. In states




that require open admission or random lottery drawing to select students, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools advises stakeholders to spend some time answering critical questions in order to create a well-crafted and clearly articulated admissions process (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, n.d.). Some of the first questions to address:

- For "whom" is the mission?
  - ◊ Who will the school serve?
  - ◊ Native only? Native and non-Native?
  - ◊ High/low achieving? Disabled?
  - ◊ Are the faculty skilled enough to meet the needs of each type of learner?

- With "whom" will the vision be realized?
  - ◊ How will a graduate from the school look? Culturally? Academically?
  - ◊ In order for the faculty to achieve the envisioned graduate, from what academic/cultural level are they trained to grow them?

- What is the cultural baseline?
  - ◊ How linguistically and culturally connected must students be?
  - ◊ How commited/involved should the parents be? If not Native, what is the expected commitment of students and parents to the Native language/ culture/values taught within the school?

The Sequoyah Immersion school, run by the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, promotes a shared sense of responsibility. By requiring a personal pledge of commitment to the school's shared values from both the students and a parent or guardian, they ensure parents and students align with the school's foundational philosophy. In explaining the success of Sequoyah, Dr. Gloria Sly, an educator for over 38 years and former Sequoyah High School superintendent, said Chief Smith's expectations, that "Students perform well and are good citizens, learn Cherokee ways and become productive members of the community" promotes success.Through the personal interaction with the child and family, much can be learned about the parent and child's understanding of and commitment to the mission as well as fit to the school. Unlike a mainstream public school, Native charters are often thought of as partners to families and the wider community. Native charters also have the distinction of supporting the growth of students' awareness, abilities, and advocacy of Native culture, art, language, and history. In contrast to schools that attend to more diverse populations and must contend with issues of anti-discrimination and equity, Native charters are able to provide a specific type of education that utilizes culture-based approaches to improve students' minds, bodies, and hearts.

## PRESCREENING AND TESTING

Many schools are using a set of pre-screening aptitude tests and interviews to gauge the readiness of possible students. Native charters can use a similar process to determine how well students and their families are ready for charter education.

Several elementary charters use an observational approach called "play session" to determine:

- How a child plays with others and manages conflict?
- How curious they are?
- How they respond/participate in cultural activities? Are they interested, fluctuate in interest, or are disengaged?
- How comfortable are they in the charter school environment? Are they excited about being at the school?

For middle/high school students, a number of Native charters are utilizing interviews with students to ascertain:

- Who is making the decision to attend? Parent? Child? Both?
- Motivation and willingness to participate and to add to the cultural environment.

- Academic proficiency and placement (California Charte School Association, n.d.).

## BUILDING AN ADMISSIONS OFFICE

The admission process should be welcoming for both child and parents, especially when one of the foundational Native philosophies is strong relationships. Office staff should:

- Exude kindness, patience, and warmth.
    - ◊ Phone, letters, and e-mails should model/reflect the values and expected conduct within the school.
- Establish a streamlined, simple process.
    - ◊ If needed, provide the support to help parents to navigate through a testing or interview process.
    - ◊ Include a component that involves face-to-face conversation or interaction.

Even when charters struggle to fill classes, their admissions office should promote the very best of Native values and philosophies. Collecting previous school records, placing students in appropriate classes, and providing parents with pertinent information all work to ensure that from the time a child and his/her parent(s) request information about the school to when the new year starts, every student feels like her/his well-being is top priority.

## HOW TO GENERATE EXCITEMENT

- Exude a genuine belief in the mission and vision of your school; talk with confidence about what you know works for the kids whom your mission will serve.
- Share research of culture-based results; data from school progress.
- Invite current students of the school to share/showcase their learning and experience:
    - ◊ How has their school experience helped them to grow culturally?
    - ◊ How have they grown academically? Socially? Emotionally? Spiritually? Share testimonies from parents.
- Have faculty members share why they are committed to the charter and its mission/vision and how they will contribute.

Include family members to learn with their children—some charters make language classes a prerequisite for admission. The acquisition of language occurs when the opportunity to speak extends beyond the school environment; the home support will strengthen both child and family.

The admission process is not only time-consuming for parents and students but also for the school. However, the time spent on smoothly admitting students will pay dividends for the school and it's staff.

# CHAPTER 4C:

## COMMUNICATIONS

In a blog managed by JCI Marketing (Cullop, 2016), the importance of communicating and marketing the worth of a charter school should:

- Invest in a website.
- Communicate a clear message.
- Create brand ambassadors.
- Use a full-service marketing agency.
- Figure out your brand.

Although some states require an open door for any student wanting admission, many charters rely on marketing and other forms of communication to advertise the worth of their schools. According to Steve Mulvenon, effective marketing and communication are the backbone

of private, parochial, and charter schools (National School Public Relations Association, n.d.). Since students are not required to attend them and, in the case of independent schools, parents must pay tuition for their child to attend, the perceived value of a school influences both student and parent alike to give it a try. In essence, each charter school must distinguish its uniqueness, particularly when parents and students have a choice.

Former National School Public Relations Association President Nora Carr articulated: "Rarely mentioned a decade ago, branding is becoming part of the educational lexicon. Borrowing a page from the private sector, school leaders are investing more time, money, and effort in defining their brand promise and position in the market place....Taken more literally, it's the promise school leaders make to families who trust them with their children's education."

While Native charter schools that attend to the needs of a Native community's youth often do not have to create and sell their "brand," what is communicated to students, their parents and families, and to the wider community is just as vital as finding the right marketing agency to publicize the type of education the school offers. Communication with parents and students in a kind, patient, and warm manner promotes trust and a willingness to enroll in the school.

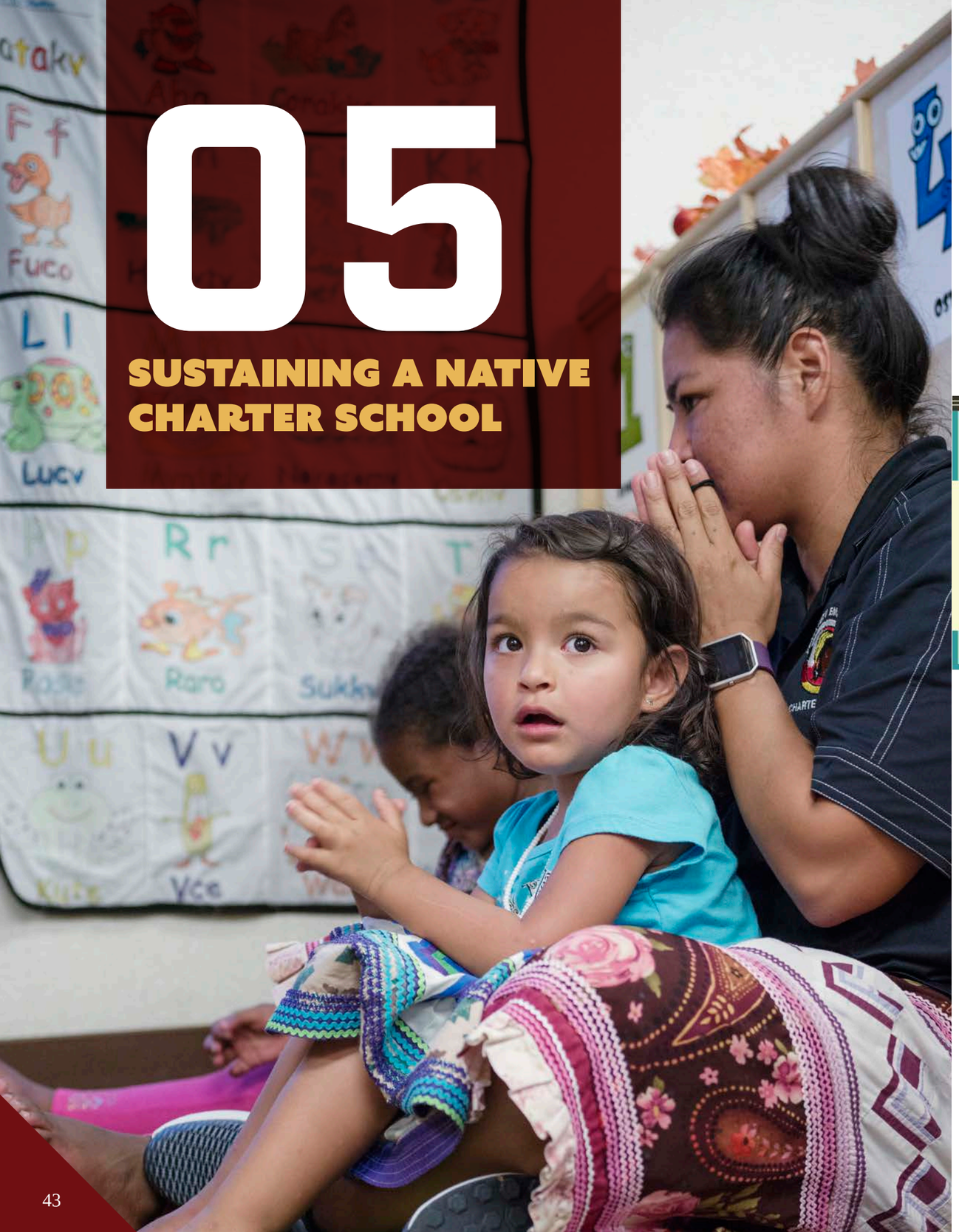
Moreover, when staff members pay attention to students, the school gains a positive identity. By identifying students by face and name, escorting students to loading zones, greeting parents by name—teachers and the school community send the message that school staff care about their students. Likewise, when staff yell or belittle, call students by other names (including inappropriate ones), or forget who parents are, the message is not what a school needs nor wants.

Equally important is constant communication about the school to all stakeholders. While some believe that messages should be tailored to portray the school in only a positive light, others suggest that while most of the messaging should highlight the wonderful events and accomplishments of the school, some of the communication should also support the reality of operating a charter school. Moreover, a charter school, especially one situated in a Native community, often becomes its hub. As such, many a community charter newsletter contains communication about members of the community—deaths, births, marriages, and other events.

Teachers have a role in communicating with stakeholders. With parents, teachers may consider sending both warning messages as well as those of congratulations and well-wishes. A powerful way to stay in touch with parents and family is to call when a student has been successful. Barbara Jean Kahawaii, a Native Hawaiian teacher, employs a monthly call home to parents. In the short, 10-15 minute call, she begins with "all of the positive growth I have seen over the last month (Kahawaii, 2017). Only after I have said the good things will I suggest how the parents can work with me to help their child improve in 1 or 2 areas...never more." Though the process is time-consuming, Kahawaii assures that the payoff is great. *"With every call, my problems with a student go down. With every call, my parents are more appreciative. With every call, I feel like we are all so much more connected."*

Finally, beyond newsletters and calls home, a key to successfully communicating with the wider community is to build connections and relationships. School leaders are often expected to be at every basketball game or prom, not only to ensure the safety of students and staff but also to talk with other stakeholders. The culture of the school must live in its staff and leaders. Respect, kindness, trust, warmth—from the head of schools or superintendent right through to the office staff—must be demonstrated by all who operate the school. Vital to the successful opening and effective first couple of years of operation is the ability for Native charters to communicate well.

**"WITH EVERY CALL, MY PROBLEMS WITH A STUDENT GO DOWN. WITH EVERY CALL, MY PARENTS ARE MORE APPRECIATIVE. WITH EVERY CALL, I FEEL LIKE WE ARE ALL SO MUCH MORE CONNECTED."**



# 05

# SUSTAINING A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

For those schools already in operation, these five areas—Strategic Planning and Growth, Educational Advancement (and Research), Financial Solvency, Infrastructure, and Human Resources and Management—become critical to their maintenance and further growth. While there are other issues and areas of importance (*e.g.*, parent and community involvement/relations, political and economic analyses/advocacy, leadership and teacher retention/burnout, transitioning board and school leader to new ways of thinking, operating, and changeover), NIEA's advisory group provided guidance to promote sustainable and healthy Native charter schools through these five areas.


## CHAPTER 5A:
### STRATEGIC PLANNING AND GROWTH

Once a school establishes a firm philosophy—found in its vision and mission—for the type of education it will provide to students and begins operations, many institutions forego systematic, periodic review and adjustment of the school's goals and daily operations. According to Ontario, Canada's Education Improvement Commission (Education Improvement Commission, 2000);

> *"All schools want their students to succeed. But schools can only make a lasting difference when they focus on specific goals and strategies for change. School improvement planning is a process through which schools set goals for improvement, and make decisions about how and when these goals will be achieved."*

Given the vast changes—social, economic, political—necessary to improve the education of Native students, a school must continually have an eye on its future, especially through the lens of continual improvement. The National Center for Educational Statistics reported that charters today serve more minorities (*e.g.*, Black, Hispanic) than their mainstream public schools counterparts (National Center For Educational Statistics, 2017). They also serve more students living in poverty or near poverty. In addition, over the last decade, the number of charters has grown, primarily in inner cities and areas of economic depression.

U.S. News and World Report predicted that the proliferation of jobs in information technology and related fields requires today's students to be much more tech-savvy and tech-literate (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). In turn, charters like Tech High in Los Angeles (Tech High, n.d.), Greenville Tech in South Carolina, and the Rogers New Technology Network in Arkansas (Rogers New Technology Network, n.d.) have become technology training grounds for the young. These examples offer Native communities a chance to build a set of skills and knowledge in their young so that as adults they can compete for lucrative, high-tech jobs.

To continually ensure that Native charter schools are not left behind due to such advancements, school administrators must critically examine the school's educational philosophy, mission, vision, and operations at regular intervals. School leadership—school administrators and board—should present to the board and other stakeholders a school improvement plan. Approximately every four to six years, the school's board should undertake a strategic planning process to determine the future of the school. Both of these practices will set a continual course of accountability and improvement.

## ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Much to the consternation of school leaders and boards, the annual reporting process can be cumbersome and time consuming. Many annual reports contain information about the school's finances, teaching and other staff, student assessment results, and other details. Explore the following resources and examples to find out more about creating and streamlining your process for charter school annual reports:

- Charter Schools USA.
- National Charter School Resource Center.
- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
- National Center for Educational Statistics.

States that authorize charter schools often have laws that prescribe annual deadlines and information on which school boards and leaders must report. In some states, charters are required to undergo an additional layer of accountability through annual or bi-annual audits of their financial records and dealings. Such accountability, as noted by LA Times reporter Anna Phillips, might be necessary in order to ensure that the public funds used to operate the school are being directed for use in classrooms and for the education of students (LA Times, 2017). A 2015 report entitled, "The Tip of the Iceberg: Charter School Vulnerabilities to Waste, Fraud, And Abuse" found that in 2015 charters lost $203 million to waste, fraud, and mismanagement (The Washington Post, 2015). If Native charter schools are not only to survive but also to be sustainable, they must have in place strict accountability measures and procedures like annual reporting and audits.



# CRITICAL FACT

**IN 2015, CHARTERS LOST $203 MILLION TO WASTE, FRAUD, AND MISMANAGEMENT.**

WASHINGTON POST

## STRATEGIC PLANNING

Equally important is forward-thinking processes like strategic planning. For Native educational systems like charter schools, administrators should consult with credible experts who have knowledge of Native educational systems. The National Charter School Institute notes, "Just the words strategic planning is enough to make some board members and school executives feel swamped" (Carpenter, 2008). This publication suggests seven steps to develop an effective strategic plan for a charter school.

While the first three steps are under the domain of the school's board, the rest require continuous collaboration between the board and leadership.

One note of caution: For Native charter schools and other Native educational providers, an expert in strategic and tactical planning should be contracted to support a strategic planning process—which normally takes a full year or more to complete. In addition, facilitating conversations both within the school and outside it, in the Native community, requires someone with an understanding of Native forms of education and the ability to successfully collaborate with Native stakeholders beyond the school grounds.

Through annual reports (and audits) and long-term strategic planning, Native communities can provide key supports for long-range sustainability in Native charter schools.

# CHAPTER 5B: EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT FOR A NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOL

One of the greatest challenges facing any school is the constant need to ensure the effectiveness of the education provided to

# CRITICAL FACT

**NEARLY 1 IN 5 NATIVE CHARTER SCHOOLS FAIL IN THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF OPERATION.**

**NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION**

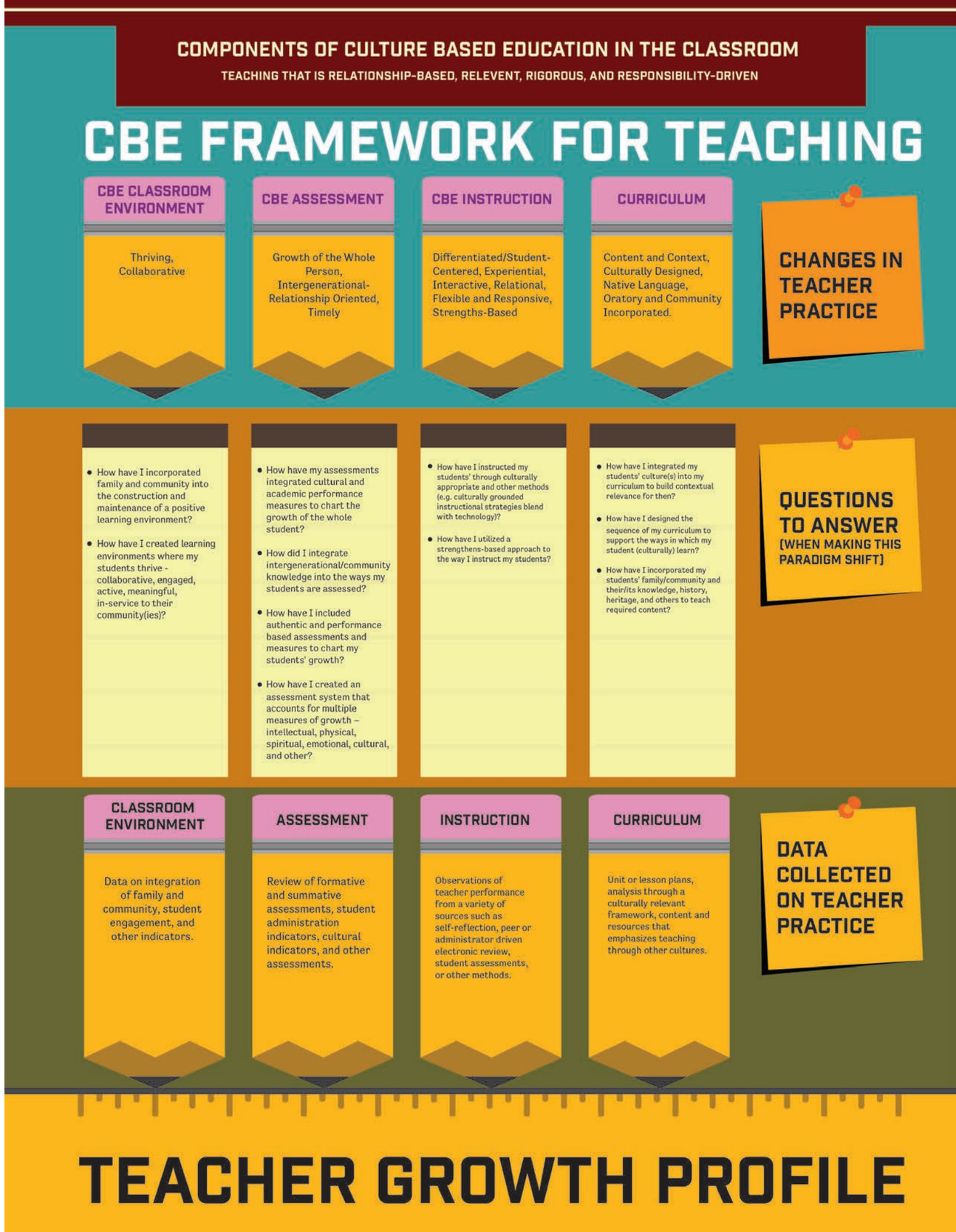
students and their families. Native charters must not only continually improve school operations but also graduate successively new generations of Native students who will continue their community's language, beliefs, practices, and other ways of being and knowing. This additional responsibility weighs heavily and is unique to Native communities and their government agencies. Thus, for Native charters and Native educational entities, blending modern educational content and practices with those of their ancestors can quickly overwhelm the most well-intentioned of school boards, leaders, and faculty.

## NATIVE CULTURE-BASED MODEL

Native charters must be thoughtful when making choices to support the continual advancement of Native education. Four primary foci outline the critical areas of teaching and learning in a Native context: curriculum, instruction, assessment and evaluation, and classroom environment. Several groups of Hawaiian educators have utilized this model to define and refine the types of teaching and learning offered to Native Hawaiian students (Kahumoku, n.d.). Over time, teachers improve their curricular content by building contextual relevance through a blend of Native knowledge, culture, and language with modern core content as well as sequencing the content to build upon student strengths. As previously mentioned by Ka'iwi, when teachers start with what students know and are able to understand—Native knowledge, culture, and language—they then can introduce Native students to new content and skills. Culture-based education helps teachers start with the strengths of each student and build upon them.

Yet a change in curriculum alone will not be enough to sustain continual growth of Native students. Countless research studies confirm the direct impact of how an educator teaches on student success in the classroom and beyond (Price, Kallam, and Love, 2010). Utilizing





a strengths-based approach grounded in traditional Native instructional practices will help students actualize academic and socio-emotional success at a much faster pace than conventional instructional practices.

One of the most significant challenges facing Native education is finding ways to assess students through Native means. Many second-language communities—Hispanic, Chinese, Hawaiian, Yup'ik, Cherokee, Navajo—have found that there is no quick fix. Translating tests and summative assessments from English into the language of choice is not only difficult, it is also inappropriate. Context clues, for example, do not often translate from one langauge to another. The use of snow falling as a context for a science question on velocity will not help students who have never lived where snow falls. Equally disturbing is the use of metaphors as a means of helping students understand a literature question on author's intent. Asking Native students to understand Shakespeare's use of blood as a metaphor to suggest the growing guilt of Macbeth is difficult, if not impossible; each Native group has its own set of symbolic images and without a transference of these into the reading, educators find it difficult to engage students in deep literary discussion. Clearly, a process for building cultural understanding is needed before testing is administered.

Finally, the classroom environment must be inviting, stimulating, and empowering for Native students. As noted in the research and publications of the renowned William Demmert, the classroom poses significant risks for Native children (Demmert, 2001). Classroom management policies and strategies centered on individual work, passive learning, teacher-centered approaches, and order conflict with Native understandings about collective, hands-on, participatory, visual, and other forms of learning. When Native students are prevented from learning through collective processes—group projects, project-based approaches that improve both academic and community well-being—and are restricted to individual measures of success, they become befuddled, or disenfranchised by the learning process. More importantly, when traditional community knowledge becomes secondary to or, worse, discredited against academic knowledge, and when learning practices at home conflict with those of the classroom, Native students struggle to understand the relevance of what is being taught in schools. Instead, integrating home and community knowledge by bringing cultural and familial practitioners into the classroom to teach offers real and credible role models for students to emulate. A wise educator also reviews discipline policies or procedures grounded in appropriate cultural discipline practices for implementation in the classroom as well as the school.

Beyond what teachers are able to do to advance the education of Native students, the school should undergo periodic review of its assessment data, discipline policies, and community engagement strategies to improve the well-being of students, their families, and the wider community. Schools should encourage intellectual growth through a set of applied learning strategies (*e.g.*, community project-based education, language competitions judged by Native spearkers) that allow students to practice conceptual knowledge in the context of improving the well-being of both oneself and the larger community.

When curriculum and instructional strategies begin the learning process from a place of student knowledge and branch out to introduce the foreign and new, children understand that they come to school with strengths and attributes. When rigorous assessment and evaluation starts from a place of relevance and relationship, Native learners can make the leaps necessary to advance their learning. Finally, when teaching and learning in an environment that embraces the home and community, Native students can use their education to improve the well-being of self, family, and community. Advancing education can be empowering for both students and community stakeholders.

*Note: NIEA provides trainings and ongoing support for establishment and expansion of educational philosophies grounded in Native beliefs, ways of knowing, and ways of being.*

# CHAPTER 5C:
## FINANCIAL SOLVENCY

As previously noted, the importance of accountability is paramount to a well-functioning, effective charter school. In this area—Financial Solvency—beyond accountability and keeping the doors open, charter leaders must continually seek funding streams to remain operational and even expand. Large charter school management corporations and systems differ from independent, single entities in that much of the "office management" work (*e.g.*, human resources, bookkeeping and payroll, legal and tech support, and even in some cases school facilities and school management) is handled by corporate offices, while teaching and some leadership decisions are held at the school level. CMOs and EMOS have sprouted up around the country to support the running of charters (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Governance, 2009). While EMOs include a number of for-profit organizations (*e.g.*, Edison Schools, Mosacia Education, National Heritage Association), CMOs (*e.g.*, Success Charter School Network, KIPP, High Tech High) tend to be non-profit networks or organizations that manage a system of charter schools (National Education Policy Center, 2013). More importantly, both EMOs and CMOs cover the majority of the financial burden for running a school. This is key when many independent start-ups close their doors within the first five years of business (Center For Research on Educational Outcomes, 2017).

Financial solvency for most independent charter schools, including those operated by Native communities, means that there needs to be a steady stream of funding from sources beyond the state and local governments to ensure that the school not only keeps its doors open but also expands services to meet the demands of the community. Some Native communities may be in a position to provide funding to charter schools. A community without its own resource mechanisms often turns to the federal government, foundations, and other sources to garner the funds to pay for salaries, professional development, and the like.

One such source is the discretionary competitive grants offered by the U.S. Department of Education (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Charter School Programs, or CSP, grants, are intended to increase the national understanding of the charter school model by (1) expanding the number of high-quality charter schools available to students across the nation by providing financial assistance for the planning, program design, and initial implementation of charter schools; and (2) evaluating the effects of charter schools, including their effects on students, student academic achievement, staff, and parents.

The Secretary of Education awards grants to State Education Agencies (SEAs) on a competitive basis to enable them to conduct charter school programs in their states. SEAs use their CSP funds to award sub-grants to non-SEA eligible applicants in their state. These sub-grants are used for two primary purposes: (1) planning, program design, and initial implementation of new charter schools; and (2) dissemination of information, including best practices, by charter schools open at least three consecutive years with demonstrated success in areas specified by statute.

Clearly, a financial portfolio that includes a mixture of permanent and supplemental funds ensures that a charter school stays

# INFRASTRUCTURE

Keys To Expanding The Size Of Your School




open. Couple this with stringent fiscal policies and guidelines as well as regular audits and reporting prevents the possibility of financial mismanagement. Similarly, charters that live "from paycheck to paycheck" or have not performed an audit in the last two years are more susceptible to questionable practices that in turn may lead to court appearances, conviction, and jail time.

## CHAPTER 5D: INFRASTRUCTURE

One of the keys to expanding the size of the school or, in some cases, expanding the school into other parts of the country is the ability to access facilities that are appropriate for teaching and learning. Many start-ups are challenged with finding appropriate venues to hold class and some have had to utilize several locations in a single semester.

Tribes and Native communities with BIE funded schools located on their tribal lands have additional options to create charter schools within the BIE. However even with this flexibility, Native charter schools face bureaucratic barriers that prevent administrators from sharing available federal education facilities due to a 1996 congressional prohibition on expanding grades or schools in the BIE (P.L., 1996, 2017).

As a school expands to accommodate new grade levels and students, the need to find adequate classroom spaces weighs heavily on the minds of board members and school-level leadership. In areas with relatively mild climates, administrators have been known to pitch tents in parking lots and open fields, transform industrial spaces into makeshift classrooms, and retrofit former apartments into spaces for teaching and learning. In response, urban centers that have abandoned buildings available for retrofitting into schools and classrooms, some educators are turning to existing building stock to create high-performance learning environments. Building Design and Construction offers eight tips for converting older buildings into schools (Building Design and Construction, 2007):

When expanding facilities, these eight guidelines can assist Native charter school start-ups and existing, expanding charters in suburban and rural areas. Note the cautions surrounding due diligence, pay upfront to decrease costly changes later, and safety-security are the first priorities. Hopefully, issues with facilities will ease once a school is at capacity.

## CHAPTER 5E: HUMAN RESOURCES AND MANAGEMENT

As was covered earlier, some charter schools rely on CMOs or EMOs to ensure that payrolls are paid on time, funding for salaries and benefits are executed, and facilities are properly maintained. This final chapter is dedicated to two fundamental aspects associated with the operations and expansion of Native charter schools: (1) Retaining a school leadership team, faculty, and staff who are growth-oriented, culturally grounded, and truly interested in the well-being of Native children; (2) Ensuring succession plans are executed for those who run the school.

### RETENTION OF GROWTH-ORIENTED, CULTURALLY GROUNDED, AND WELL-BEING FOCUSED SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

A report produced by Grant and Gillespie (Grant, 1993) more than two decades ago showed a severe shortage of Native teachers, President Obama's report (Office of the President, n.d.) on the status of American Indian and Alaska Native education mirrored the same conclusion: there is still a huge shortage of qualified Native teachers and school administrators.

## INSPIRED THOUGHT

**"MY HOPE FOR AMERICAN INDIAN EDUCATION... IS FOR TEACHERS TO...CREATE A WORLD WHERE ALL PEOPLE ARE ACCEPTED FOR WHO THEY ARE AND THE CONTRIBUTIONS THEY CAN MAKE TO SOCIETY AS A WHOLE, AND TO BRING ABOUT A SMALLER WORLD OF PEACE AND JUSTICE FOR ALL."**

**CAROL REMPP**

*"Reservation-based and other schools with large Native populations face tremendous obstacles in recruiting and retaining teaching and leadership talent, including uncompetitive salaries, isolated rural settings, tough working conditions, few amenities, lack of job opportunities for spouses, and marginal housing."*

Carol Rempp (Nebraska Department of Education, 2004), representing Nebraska's Department of Education, suggests that:

*"There are many ways that teachers can teach students. They have an endless influence on students. Along with that comes a great responsibility. One teacher can do so much to promote acceptance of diversity. My hope for American Indian Education and education in general is for teachers to understand and accept this responsibility, embrace this responsibility, and use it to create a world where all people are accepted for who they are and the contributions they can make to society as a whole, and to bring about a smaller world of peace and justice for all."*

Native charters should actively and continually help all of their employees understand the importance of enhancing students' well-being through the school's educational strategies and overall philosophy. Reaching common understanding, building consensus, and strengthening ongoing professional development to increase participation of all stakeholders will support continued commitment to the school and its vision and mission. As the charter grows and more employees are added, veterans can become


integral orientation and training facilitators to help on-board the new staff. Even parents and community members can be great partners in an effort to reach and sustain a strong commitment to the school and its students.

### INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Sherman, Wells, and Dedrick found that (1) few succession plan models exist and (2) 80% of superintendents believed that there were no programs in their district that identified individuals aspiring to be superintendents (Sherman, Wells, and Dedrick, 2017). They recommend that succession planning for school leaders should be viewed in terms of the organization's present and future needs instead of preparing a person to become the next leader. There should be opportunities for upward mobility of all members of the organization, thus providing school boards with qualified internal candidates if it so chooses.

It is imperative that Native educational programs, schools, and school systems that invest in the rank and file of educators, particularly the young who have a number of years of school-level experience, can improve the chances for successful leadership succession. Through coordination with their Native community, advanced degrees and certificates, and leadership experience in their respective schools, Native educational programs will help the organization and community create a cadre of well-prepared, well-trained candidates for leadership.

Not only should charter schools invest in building the capacities of their personnel, but they should also work alongside teacher and leadership preparation programs to help produce more culture-based teachers. For a list of teacher preparation programs, visit www.NIEA.org.

Clearly, for Native charter schools to not only survive but thrive, they and the communities they serve must invest in the development of Native teachers and school leaders. Developing a succession plan and seeking key alliances with Native teacher and leadership preparation programs will help develop the next generation of Native educators and support Native charter schools across the country.

# CONCLUSION

Charter education has the potential to support the growth of Native students by revitalizing and renormalizing their Native ways of knowing, believing, and being. Communities that strive to actively improve education for their students can create schools that engage and empower future generations. Charter schools present a unique opportunity for Native communities to prepare their students for life in the modern world by providing a culturally-responsive, academically rigorous education.

By understanding the expectations, foundations, and necessities of building a charter school, Native communities can begin to build systems that meet the needs of their students. As you work to improve education systems for your tribe and community, this handbook is a first step towards creating and sustaining an educational process that focuses on strengths rather than deficits.

NIEA hopes this handbook provides a framework to assist your community in building a positive learning environment that prepares your students for college, career, and community success.

Contact our offices to find out how NIEA can support you, and your community, as you create learning environments where Native students can be inspired, engaged, and thrive.

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